

Room Service Here: With Your Bed Bugs

It's always nice to find a surprise when you stay in a hotel room. A free upgrade or complimentary fruit basket is always a nice touch. But some little extras # like bed bugs # are much nastier surprises

A hotel can be one of the main carriers of bed bugs. This shouldn't really come as a surprise, as bed bugs are known to live and breed in beds and mattresses. The growing number of complaints about bed bugs from hotel guests only proves that the problem is steadily increasing.

No one is quite sure why the reports of bed bug infestations are increasing. One theory is that the insects are becoming resilient and even immune to the regular insecticides used to treat the problem. Each generation mutates with a stronger defense against the chemicals. Sounds like great B-movie fodder, but it's a shocking fact of real life.

History of Bed Bugs

Bed bug infestations were common in hotels in the United States before WWI. The problem all but vanished, however, thanks to a combination of better hygiene practices and the widespread use of DDT pesticide dusting during the 1940s and 1950s. While virtually eliminated in the United States, the problem did persist in other areas of the world including parts of South and Central Europe, Africa and Asia.

Now, bed bugs are returning to hotels in North America as well. It's suggested that increased tourism and immigration has led to the problem, as people unwittingly bring the insects with them from other parts of the world. An infestation can happen quickly, as just one female bed bug can produce five eggs a day, and bring three new generations to the hotel.

Another, more scientific theory is that reappearance of bed bugs in hotels is due to cutbacks on the strength of pesticides used in hotels. DDT was banned in the 1960's, and it was the only insecticide found to effectively kill the bed bugs in hotels.

The bed bugs found in hotels are the same bed bugs that infest private homes. They are small, flat, oval-shaped and brownish critters that closely resemble ticks. These insects aren't choosy about their accommodations. They just need a warm place to live and breed in, and a nearby source of human blood to feed on. Unfortunately, bed bugs are so patient, and so resilient, that they can live for up to a year without taking a meal of blood.

Many people don't even realize that they have bed bugs. The bugs are tiny, and they only come out to feed at night while their victims sleep. Most people don't feel a thing as they're being bitten. When a bed bug feeds, it pierces the skin with its elongated beak. The insect injects a small amount of saliva that contains an anesthesia-like substance, making the piercing pain-free and virtually undetectable. The only that sign you've been visited by a bed bug is if you wake to find an itchy, swollen welt.

Lawsuits Grow

Bed bugs don't congregate only in cheap, dingy motels. Even upscale hotels have fallen victim to these tiny menaces. The problem has resulted in lost revenue for many establishments, as unsatisfied patrons are filing lawsuits and spreading the word about their unpleasant experiences.

While a bed bug infestation can rob a hotel owner of both profit and credibility, the way that many establishments treats the problem is quite appalling. Rather than providing a solution for customers, some hotel staff and owners simply dismiss the incident. This has incurred the wrath of many patrons, who have taken their complaints all the way to the courtroom. In one such case, guests at a bug-infested hotel chose to sue the hotel for damages. They contested that because the management did not disclose their problem with bed bugs in hotels, they risked the health and well being of the patrons. The court agreed, and found the hotel guilty.

The problem of bed bugs in hotels is huge, but the bigger problem is that hotels fail to disclose the facts to their potential and current customers. Of course, most people would choose not to stay at the hotel if they know that there was a problem with bed bugs, and that's a risk that hotel owners are just not willing to take. If and when an infestation occurs, the hotel can easily call a pest control expert in to remedy the problem.

Protect Yourself

Of course, it is a hotel's duty to provide customers with good service and a clean environment, free from bed bugs. Travelers, however, must be aware of the risks and use precaution to protect themselves. When traveling, always bring along an anti-itch cream just in case. Feel free to ask other hotel patrons about the cleanliness of the hotel before you check in. The Internet is also a great source of information, with reviews and ratings available for many hotels. Look for comments regarding patrons' personal experiences. This information can help you decide on which hotel to visit on your next trip. In the even that a hotel should misinform you about their bed bug infestation, you can use that as grounds for making a complaint and possibly retrieving your travel dollars.

Not all surprises are nice, particularly when you're far away from home. Use care when traveling to make sure that the only little "extras" you find in your hotel room are pleasant ones!